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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR TODD ENCOURAGES BRUNEI'S ENVIRONMENTALISM

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Ambassador Todd has encouraged Government of Brunei (GoB) officials, as well as the private sector to pursue more definitive actions to protect the environment. Of particular interest is the Heart of Borneo (HoB) initiative. Recently, Ambassador Todd met with the likely new head of Brunei's HoB Council who discuss the difficulties that Brunei and the Hob Project face within Brunei. While funding is available, specific conservation actions as well as comprehensive master plans are not completed or even started. Additionally, the US Embassy is currently unable to provide aid bilaterally to the GoB, which limits Embassy's official engagement. Brunei can serve as the "honest broker" for regional efforts but more direct support and guidance is needed. End Summary.

AMBASSADOR TODD METS WITH HoB LEADERS

2. (SBU) Recently, Ambassador Todd invited local and regional Heart of Borneo officials to met with him regarding the current status of the HoB initiative. Mr. Mikail Cavanaugh, who is likely to be selected as the new head of the Brunei HoB council, briefed the Ambassador on his ideas and concerns regarding HoB in Brunei and regionally. Cavanaugh told Ambassador Todd that while Brunei has received solid financial support from a variety of sources, actual project work is progressing slowly. He noted that private sector companies have given over a million dollars (Brunei). In addition, the British and Japanese governments have continued to provide financial and technical support on a bilateral basis to Brunei. Lack of direction, limited planning, and a wait and see attitude have hampered conservation efforts. Corporate sponsors are now placing some of their donations on hold. Cavanaugh noted that Brunei can serve as an "honest broker" for regional conservation efforts and as a catalyst for further action. He said Brunei would welcome more direct USG involvement on a bilateral basis. Ambassador Todd and Mr. Cavanaugh agreed that environmental issues, such as deforestation and water management have broader regional stability concerns.

WWF PERSPECTIVE

3. (SBU) Cavanaugh provided Ambassador Todd with a comprehensive overview from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) perspective. WWF sees the HoB Initiative as a collaborative effort to establish and reinforce a network of protected areas and sustainably-managed forests, through international cooperation led by the three nations containing the Heart of Borneo - Brunei, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Central to the success of the Heart of Borneo Initiative is enhanced transboundary collaboration, engagement of local interests in short and long-term planning, sustainable financing, and the cooperation of the private sector and civil society in establishing sustainable resource management practices.

4. (SBU) Since the signing of the Heart of Borneo Declaration in

2007, WWF has assisted the three governments in developing a trinational blueprint designed to enhance national actions through improved cooperation and transboundary collaboration. The overarching trilateral political commitment to the HoB is a cornerstone for future conservation and sustainable development success. WWF believes regional collaboration is necessary to realize a comprehensive program of sound resource management in the face of climate change impacts, protect biodiversity and enhance regional economic and resource security.

REVIEW OF BRUNEI'S ROLE IN HoB

15. (U) Cavanaugh also reviewed Brunei's Role in HoB. He noted the HoB initiative began with an exploratory international workshop that was held on 5-6th April 2005, hosted by Brunei's Ministry of Industry & Primary Resources (MIPR), with the assistance of WWF. It generated a conservation vision and an action plan for the Heart of Borneo. Since then, the ASEAN Heads of Government have endorsed the importance of conserving a network of protected areas in the Heart of Borneo (Kuala Lumpur, December 2005) and the BIMP-EAGA Heads of Government have made this a Flagship Project which has their full support (Kuala Lumpur, December 2005 and Cebu, January 2007). In March 2006, at the 8th Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Curitiba, Brazil, the three Bornean governments affirmed their intention to work together to conserve and sustainably manage the Heart of Borneo.

16. (U) Subsequently, MIPR hosted the First Trilateral Implementation Meeting for HoB in Bandar Seri Begawan. Among the agreements at this meeting, Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia undertook to prepare their own national HoB implementation plans, while at the same time developing international co-ordination mechanisms to ensure the

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harmonious development of the overall initiative. Brunei's national document, the Project Implementation Framework, provides a roadmap for the national Heart of Borneo endeavour and was completed in May 2008. It has subsequently been accepted by the national HoB Council, which itself has been established as the guiding body for HoB implementation in Brunei.

17. (U) It is important to note that Brunei has played a major catalytic role from the very beginning when it convened the April 2005 workshop. It has effectively contributed to leadership of the initiative through skilled diplomacy, and it is able to act as a pilot or testing-ground for both planning and projects precisely because of its manageable size and relative lack of some pressures on its natural resources. This is why Brunei is able to style itself as the Beacon of the Heart of Borneo, and therefore U.S.G. support for the Heart of Borneo through Brunei will further enhance the country's unique ability to lead transnational collaboration with Indonesia and Malaysia.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) Brunei wants to be a leader in Environmental causes. However, lack of planning and a slow decision making process by the GoB has stymied much of their progress. Because Brunei is rich in hydrocarbon resources they can afford to promote good stewardship of the land, water, and air. The real problem is they do not have the technical skill to implement their conservation plans and lack a comprehensive master plan. This lack of progress has lead some of Brunei's major Hob corporate donors (Shell, HSBC) to hesitate on further commitments. Brunei has often started major programs, such as increased rice production, but seen them flounder for lack of planning and technical expertise. Ambassador Todd has spoken out on how Brunei can move forward and is committed to continue US Embassy engagement. Bilateral efforts will be greatly enhanced if the Embassy were able to bring aid and expertise directly to Brunei, especially to facilitate their role as a catalyst and honest broker in regional conservation efforts.

TODD